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REVIEWS OF FRIDAY AND SATURDAY SHOWS

Patti preaches and Grizzly Bear warbles mini-epics

JOHN MORSTAD THE GAZETTE

Patti Smith advocated brotherhood – and angrily denounced George Bush – at St. Jean Baptiste Church on Friday.

PIERRE OBENDRAUF THE GAZETTE

Buck 65: back to his rap roots.

TIM SNOW THE GAZETTE

Black Mountain did a stoner stomp Saturday under the cover of Amber Webber's incantatory wail.

FRIDAY

Purists may balk at rock 'n' roll invading the ornate St. Jean Baptiste Church, but **Patti Smith** preached the same virtues as the most inspirational of sermons. There was a sense of ritual in the mostly acoustic concert – not just due to the dazzling venue, but to the ceremonial progress of Ghost Dance. Beneath the Southern Cross's meditative chords and a hymn-like Helpless. There was also a sense of community, with Smith whirling through the aisles in Dancing Barefoot, and fervently advocating brotherhood – "the best of what this church stands for" – before a gorgeous Peaceable Kingdom.

The grand finale of Babelogue/Rock 'n' Roll N–ger traded positive preaching for atomic anger, with Smith shouting the anti-Bush intro over bludgeoned acoustic guitars, her voice rising to Revelation-level apocalypse. The song's notorious social-outcast metaphor would have sent the pious sprinting for the exit, but Friday's congregation understood the intent. And as Smith's electric guitar wreaked as much havoc as the tender sound system could handle, everybody knew we belonged to the right church.

JORDAN ZIVITZ

"The only thing I hate more than French Canadians ..." Welcome back, David Yow. It's good to see that almost a decade out of the spotlight hasn't dulled the former Jesus Lizard howler's anti-social tendencies. Now fronting the anarchic three-piece **Qui**, Yow was up to his old raving and drooling standards at La Sala Rossa, as guitarist Matt Cronk and drummer Paul Christensen churned out black-hearted stoner riffs and brown-acid psychedelia. A barking-mad roar through Zappa's Willie the Pimp was the indisputable highlight, but the entire set was genuinely dangerous and uncompromising. Still, Qui suffered on two counts: a lack of focus, and being experienced after Patti Smith's hallelujah of a show.

JORDAN ZIVITZ

At Club Soda, **Michel Pagliaro** was the high priest of his church of prototypical rock & roll – with cross-hatched riffs, sublime chord changes, fat bass bottom and soulful shouts. Dressed in sharply cut dark suit, white shirt and tie, and trademark large shades, his hair wild and beard almost white, Pag at 59 was in amazingly fine voice. Like Thelonious Monk in jazz, his hit songs were at once familiar and new-sounding: the irresistible Chuck Berry rip-off, Louise; the drop-dead melodramatic Temps presse and Espion; the delirious Emeute dans la prison; the ever encouraging message of Héros; and Les Bombes, arguably rock's greatest protest and remarkably prescient for today's dangerous world. Pag proved again why he's not only the king of Québécois rock but also the music's missing link.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

After excursions into country, French chanson, electro and rock, Canadian hip-hopper **Buck 65** returns to his rap roots on his new album, Situation (out Oct. 30). And so he brought the boom-bap back in his packed concert at La Tulipe. Backed by fellow former-Haligonian (and current Montrealer) Scratch Bastid on the turntables, Buck did away with tall tales, swinging mechanic's lamps and other theatrics he has employed over the years, and delved into the funky bump of the new material, tossing in old classics like The Centaur along the way. One new song, The Rebel, had a hint of Johnny Cash, but stayed grounded by a bassy beat. The esoterica makes Buck 65 unique, but it was great to hear him focus on just being funky.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

There's not a lot of room for surprise with **DJ Krush.** The Japanese DJ has explored variations on his eerie, melancholy, head-nodding hip-hop aesthetic for over a decade. He continued the trip at Le National Friday. A beefed-up sound system accommodated the rumbling bass, while Krush layered horns and static over staggered, subterranean beats. His drum sounds are unique, but all too familiar – a crisp, cold bass and snare combo that he reverts to time and time again. And yet, something happened after 20-or-so minutes of letting the music sink in. Time expanded and subtleties emerged as Krush patiently, playfully carved out his hypnotic sonic sculptures. The template may be familiar but the execution was inspired.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

The (to some) unlikely hybrid unveiled at Club Lambi's **Jamaica to Toronto** show could be explained by a certain ubiquitous reggae legend. It was a "Soul shakedown party" (thanks, Bob), as a crew of old-timer Torontonian reggae/R&B studio session vets showed they still have the chops to move the dance floor. Covers of Jackie Mittoo, Otis Redding and James Brown were on the set list, as well as several originals. But rather than sounding like a washed-up cover band, these guys came off as the real deal, much to the delight of the sweaty, giddy, dancing crowd. And the show again proved Pop Montreal's ongoing assertion that music is not excluded from the adage that we have lots to learn from our elders.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

Depending on which blogger you believe, you may not have **Patrick Wolf** to kick around much longer. The English pop dramatist banged out a tirade on a fan website announcing his retirement in November. Perhaps that's been rescinded. The currently active singer was in his element in Cabaret, a Wolf in sheepish clothing, dressed like a boy scout on a different kind of parade in knee socks and shorts.

Fronting bowed bass, violin, drums, keys and Mac, Wolf deftly deployed his FX and instruments in chamber-pop drama that has retained its indie-folktronic allure while brushing right up against the mainstream. With the lavish but not overdone falsetto in his theatrical '80s voice and the rippling melodic lines, Wolf never beat an idea into the ground.

MARK LEPAGE

The **United Steel Workers of Montreal** held their revival meeting in Le Gymnase, correctly identified by one local rock celeb as the second coming of the legendary Cargo. Incredibly, Gern f. wore wool socks and a hat for most of their set on a night when October impersonated June. No impersonations onstage though: the USWM are the genuine article, an urban roots bastard of lifers.

Gern dedicated Small Town Banks to anyone "who did one of two things: spent half their life working on a s–ty car, or spent half their life in jail." This Pogues/Waits/truckstop music has room for shtick a country mile wide, and USWM avoid it with a lived-in blue-collar personality wised up for meaner times.

MARK LEPAGE

Hollerado, escapees from parts unknown, Ontario, threw themselves into the in-your-face intimacy of L'Escogriffe. The idea here was to confirm two premises: (a) this young band rocks harder live than in their recorded tracks, and (b) they are the hottest new rock band in the city. Most assuredly on, (a), with Menno Versteeg and Nixon Boyd turning up the guitars. And assuming we measure "new" in minute-to-minute terms in Montreal now, a qualified yes on (b): qualified because the album will decide it. And because a band like Hot Springs can't be deemed "old" yet, can it?

As the very unsecret special guests on the bill, **Hot Springs** delivered yet another thrillingly intense performance. Singer Giselle Webber was in good, even goofy cheer, enjoying the nose-close audience, giggling as she led into Pink Money.

This close, you remarked at how Webber's voice slides from girlish melody to that tightly-wound vibrato. From the daringly cut dress through the primal lack of artifice in her singing, this girl holds nothing back, and her band shares in the rock 'n' roll *unnhh* of it all.

MARK LEPAGE

From a motley array of zydeco strumming, rock drumming and general happy harmonies, Montreal's **Plants and Animals** conjured up broad compositions that left space for expansive Pat Metheny-style jazz-country soloing and the odd moment of quiet tenderness. Textures ranged from bedroom trio to orchestral – at times it was hard to believe there were only three musicians on the Ukrainian Federation's stage. And if the sound veered occasionally off-kilter, it was easily passed off as adding to the sense of home-grown, unpolished adventure.

KATE MOLLESON

Brooklyn's **Grizzly Bear** managed to transform the Ukrainian Federation's school-gym acoustics into layer upon dreamy layer of warm, intricately textured timbres. Using tastefully applied reverb and distortion, the boys' warbling four-part vocals and quirky, haunting harmonies were strangely evocative of seaside boardwalks or the hazy pastels of a Sophia Coppola film. It's a soundscape in sepia – nostalgic and immediate, exotic and deeply personal. The band said they were trying out new arrangements, but still, each song had the structured and expansive scope of a small epic. This is a band that performs thoughtfully and delivers an entirely original range of sounds. A definite best-of-the-fest contender.

KATE MOLLESON

Somehow the no-frills grunge of Le Gymnase made an appropriate fit for **Ted Leo and the Pharmacists'** show. Leo's solid '90s punk rock felt dated amidst the festival's oh-so-now inundation of folky fiddles and banjos, the Pharmacists's lack of synths and kitch a refreshing novelty. Sound was loud and dirty, rendering Leo's famed anti-establishment lyrics inaudible, but the DC legends played with enough frantic force that the sizable crowd of enthusiastic headbangers seemed content.

KATE MOLLESON

SATURDAY

"You have to have a sense of irony, and loathing for your enemies," counselled legendary, Montreal-born comedian/satirist **Mort Sahl.** "You have to draw blood, with devastating, merciless humour." The elements were there at Club Soda, but in vastly diminished proportions compared to what the incendiary, 80-year-old agent provocateur could muster in his heyday. The show was yet another Pop Montreal anomaly – senior-citizen standup at an indie-rock fest. Complaining about grating "Jamaican techno reggae" was as close as Sahl got to anything music-related. Elsewhere he told "mostly-true" stories about Woody Allen, Frank Sinatra and, of course, George Bushes Junior and Senior. He was charming and eloquent, but hardly incendiary.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

The house party took off, eventually, but they didn't play Pass the Peas. Legendary funk trombonist **Fred Wesley** (sideman to James Brown and George Clinton) sat in with Montreal klez-hopper **Socalled** at La Sala Rossa; but his genius surfaced only in spurts. The biggest reason? He wasn't given room to shine. He came out several songs into Socalled's set for the infectious Tweet Tweet, a head-bobbing groove that opened into a bustin' loose jam. And he chipped in on goofy ditties such as Oh No, No More Snow. But it wasn't until the closing number, Wesley's own House Party, that things really took off. Wesley played MC, leading the crowd in a spirited singalong – an inspired end to a fun but uneven show.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

Ron Sexsmith may have notched up a Pop Montreal first at the Ukrainian Federation: a show that started early. Strange for an artist you can usually set your watch to. Sexsmith isn't the most dynamic of performers, but he's stockpiled enough jewels that he could pick titles out of a hat and have a winning set list. Hands of Time was a beauty among beauties; after the sweet harmonies of One Less Shadow, Sexsmith judged that "we've tested the waters enough to semi-rock out." The loping backbeat of In Place of You proved he's nothing if not self-aware. Self-effacing, too: After a soul-drenched piano ballad from his forthcoming album, Sexsmith joked, "We can take that off the record if you don't like it."

JORDAN ZIVITZ

The ragged edges of **Islands'** genre-mashing fantasyland-pop at Cabaret du Musée Juste pour rire were explained early on by bandleader Nick T. (formerly Nick Diamonds): "This is our first show in almost a year." A qualified success, then, with new songs sounding more sophisticated, less Ritalin-deprived than the old ones. Mr. T. may agree, vowing before Don't Call Me Whitney, Bobby that "we hate all our old songs, so this is one of the few you'll hear tonight." The "we suck" theme was revisited with Rough Gem. "It's a song we collectively don't like," Nick said. "I think we're going to retire it tonight." If he's telling the truth (never a sure bet), it went out in style, with an Antony impersonator warbling in Nick's place.

JORDAN ZIVITZ

Le National was in fact nationwide Saturday, with CBC 3 in from Vancouver to broadcast the three-band bill on Sirius. Given they were the least known, Brooklyn's **Oakley Hall** may have fared best, finding an almost Jefferson Airplane groove between Patrick Sullivan and Rachel Cox's voices in Lazy Susan.

Despite middle-status on the bill, **Sunset Rubdown** was the defacto headliner, with Spencer Krug's anxiously melodic songs. His yelp led the way into Shut Up, I'm Dreaming Of Places Where Lovers Have Wings and other indie-pop neo-anthems. And then into newer material. "You've never heard (this) before, no matter how much Internet surfing you do," Krug told the crowd. The ensuing song was the most driving in the set, with the keyboard motley stripped back.

Then, it was B.C., bud. **Black Mountain** took to the newly spare stage under cover of pulsing organ and Amber Webber's incantatory wail. The room-filling drama loosed itself into a stoner stomp, which was more recognizable. Last year's show in the same venue had been heavier, less sinuous, and so this was a good sign ... as were guitarist Stephen McBean's dozen or so pedals. Tighter than their previous appearance, still less than utterly, heavily galvanizing.

MARK LEPAGE

Jade McNelis sat cross-legged at her Rhodes, eyes closed and fingers hammering out basic keyboard vamps while she sang sweetly, but inaudibly, over a four-piece backup band. Poorly balanced amplification was, as so often, the villain of the show; heavy bass and drums obscured any identifiable quality to McNelis's tone, so the end result was a half-empty Portuguese Association bombarded with generic indie chord progressions and the odd "thank you" giggled from the girl in question. The fact that several audience members sprawled sleeping, or passed out, at tables surrounding the small stage didn't bode well for the show's engagement levels.

KATE MOLLESON

All three guys in the French group **Jordan** sang in high-pitched wails, as if David Byrne was in the throes of being strangulated, at Quai des Brumes, and occasional shards of trenchant dissonance punctuated their minimalist chunka-chunka sound that tried to pass for psycho-garage-rock (with Soft Cell organ bleeps for effect). But these garçons seemed too sweet to make it convincing. However, cultural anomalies ran rampant: Frenchmen introducing their broken-English songs at a predominantly Quebecois bar in fruity ooh-la-la anglo accents. To wit: Fortune ("Eeet's about monaie") or Angles, ho-ha, "could also be le philosophe Engels." Well, if you say so.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

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